



GLOBE PHOTO / BRIAN SNYDER

At Duxbury Beach, Charlotte Marquis, 4, intently searched for sea creatures.

Beach is a summer classroom

By Jeff McLaughlin
GLOBE STAFF

DUXBURY — Mud is fun for children of all ages, and when it's the mud of tidal flats by the seashore on a hot summer's day, the appeal is irresistible.

Last weekend's "Meet the Mudflat" program at Duxbury Beach was equal parts fun and discovery and detective work for the score of children and parents who took part.

"Mud is fun enough, but when there's a whole host of interesting creatures to discover living in the mud, natural curiosity just takes over and they love it," said teacher-naturalist Lorraine Rubinacci of the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

This is the sixth year that Rubinacci has led the summerlong series of natural history programs at Duxbury Beach. The two-hour field trips are free and open to all, thanks to

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the sponsorship of the nonprofit Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc.

There are three programs each week, all running from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., and all beginning at the same gathering spot, the seaward side of the Powder Point Bridge that leads to Duxbury Beach.

The Tuesday and Thursday sessions are aimed at adults and teenagers, while Saturday mornings are geared for families, particularly those with children in elementary and middle schools.

"No matter what the topic, the approach is guided exploration, with the participants taking a lead role," said Rubinacci. "Even with the adult programs, when we often have a guest expert coming in to talk about a particular subject, it's not a lecture - the questions that are asked are what really drives everything."

At the heart of the Duxbury Beach series are programs devoted to natural habitats and the different communities of organisms that call the seashore home. There's more to

going to the beach than simply reveling in sun, sand, and surf, and children love to discover what's going on in tide pools, salt marsh, sand dunes, and mudflats, Rubinacci said.

"The kids probably see holes and tracks and burrows every time they go to the beach, but they don't necessarily connect them to animal life," she said. "So we show them the different ways to find things. Last weekend we found green crabs and hermit crabs, soft and hardshell clams, and razor clams, many different kinds of worms. ... We took a pitchfork of mud, rinsed it in clear water through a sieve, and looked at what remained. The kids were amazed."

Rubinacci, born in Pawtucket, R.I., lives now on Third Cliff in Scituate, with a view that on a clear day seems as if it might stretch to Portugal. "My parents took me to the ocean when I was a little kid," she said, "but I never really learned all that much about the natural history. So I'm making up for lost time myself."

"There's no way to characterize the people who come," she said, "except they all seem to be highly curious people. They come

from all over, and I don't just mean all over the south suburbs, because we get vacationers, too."

The week ahead includes three programs that have proved in years past to be among the most popular of the summer, Rubinacci said.

On Tuesday, Scott Hecker, director of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's coastal waterbird program and an expert on endangered plovers and terns and their habitats, will discuss the highly successful recovery program on Duxbury Beach that is overseen by Mass. Audubon and Duxbury harbor master Don Beers.

Thursday's session will focus on the plants that grow wild on beaches and nearby coastal habitats and what they can teach seaside gardeners.

And the family session on Saturday is for clam diggers - veterans of the flats and clam-digger wannabes.

► For more information about the Duxbury Beach series, call Mass. Audubon's South Shore regional headquarters in Marshfield: 781-837-9400.